THE ART EXHIBITION CATALOGUES OF THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
45 South Street
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3AG
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck
New Jersey 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1975

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers.

Serial numbers: Each title is given a seven-figure serial number placed in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. This is an accession number. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears: the first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

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Location of original: The National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

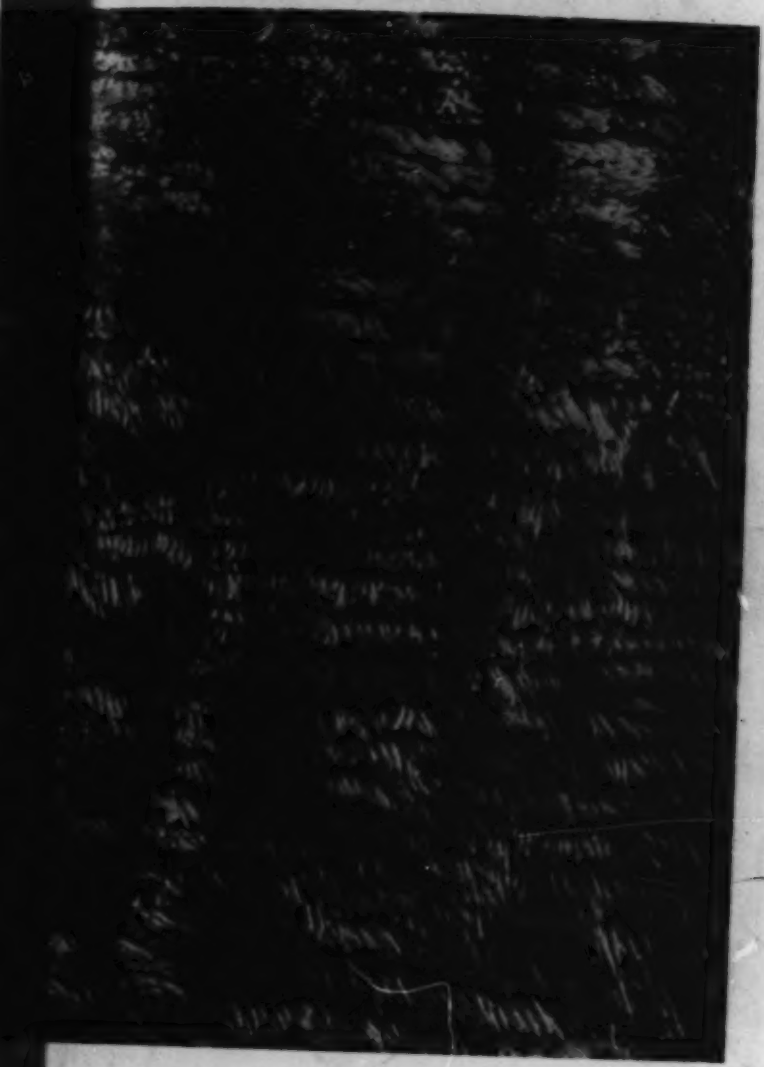
Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford.

Note:

These catalogues are being filmed from bound volumes in the Victoria and Albert Museum Library. We regret that in some cases text and illustrations are lost through tight binding.

FINNISH RUGS



VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM : 1s. 3d. net

Uhra Simberg-Ehrström '*Four Colours*' 1957

Friends of Finnish

ORICAL RUGS. 18th and 19th century examples are shown from the following collections:

nal Museum, Helsinki
rical Museum, Turku
m of South Ostrobothnia, Vasa
Museum, Borgao
m of Crafts and Design, Helsinki
mmer Gallery, Helsinki
ria and Albert Museum, London

ERN RUGS. The following owners and artists are represented:

t of Finnish Handicrafts, Helsinki:	Margaretha Ahlstedt-Willandt Sirkka Autio-Pölkkynen Eva Brummer Kirsti Ilvessalo Kaija Mustakallio Toini Nyström Lotta Ring Christina Sandman Uhra Simberg-Ehrström Eila Annikki Vesimaa Karin Vikstedt Hilkka Vuorinen
te of Crafts and Design, Helsinki:	Maaretta Wallenius-Vonlaufen
, Helsinki:	Eva Brummer Vappu Niittylä
ria and Albert Museum, London:	Kirsti Ilvessalo
Vuorelma, Lahti:	Maija-Liisa Forss Raija Gripenberg Maija Kolsi-Mäkelä Kaija Mustakallio-Suominen
ika Wetterhoff School of tic Crafts, Hämeenlinna:	Laila Karttunen

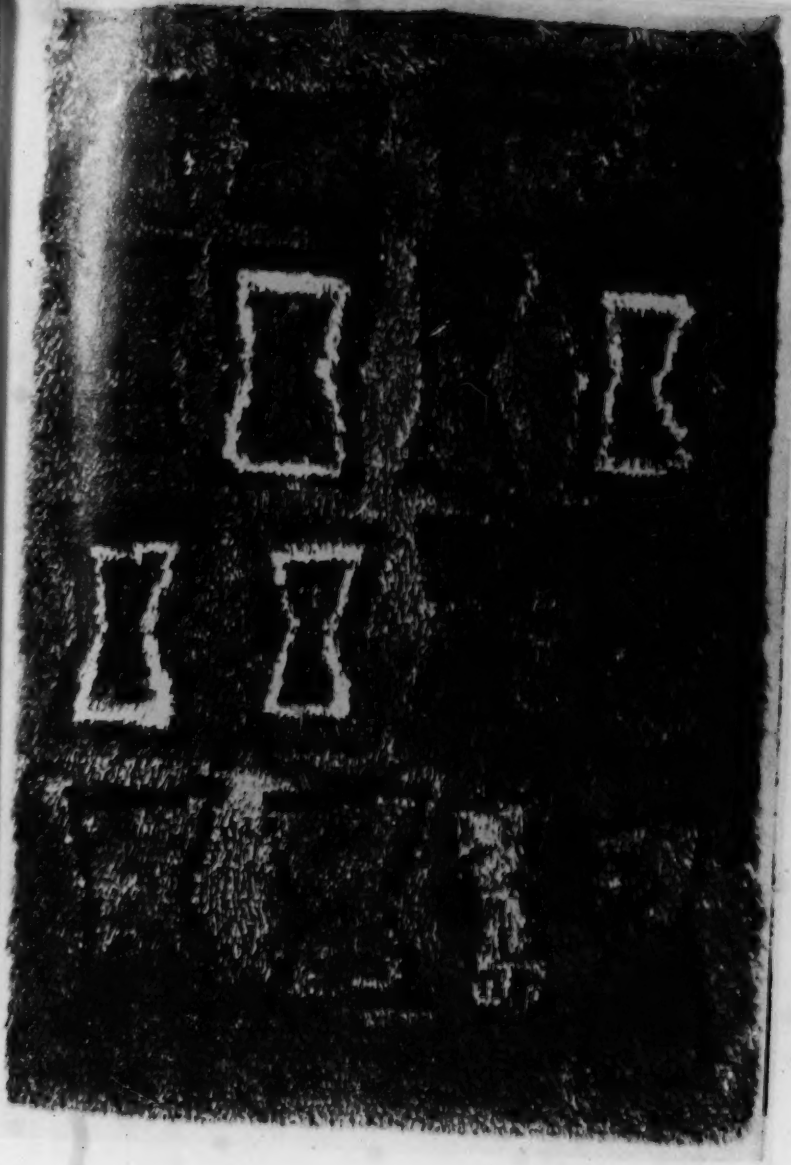
Alakanto, *Helsinki*
Snellman-Hänninen, *Helsinki*

more the rug became the object of artistic interest, the shorter and thicker became the pile and the lighter the rug, so that the fine decorative work could be clearly seen. From old documents it may be presumed that the change was already becoming apparent in the finest Finnish rugs of the 16th century. The rugs which survive to-day date only from the 18th and 19th centuries, when, side by side with strong pile rugs for everyday use, the pictorial rugs had developed to their full brilliance and beauty as ceremonial wall-coverings and valuable objects of inheritance.

Primarily decorative rugs were the inheritance of the female line of a family. It was usually part of the bride's dowry and remained in the possession of the widow or was bequeathed to the daughter as part of her dowry. Apart from being used as a wall covering which could be borrowed by neighbours to complete the decorations for a wedding festivity or for other special occasions, the rug was used as a wedding carpet or as a cover for the bridal bed. The appearance of a powerful magic symbol, the shield of St. Hans, is easily understandable when one considers the importance of such an occasion.

The oldest types of rug, made of two strips sparsely woven and napped only on the upper side, were plain in colour or decorated with repeated geometrical motifs. They have been found in Åland (Ahvenanmaa), as far as Vaasa in the North, and in the Swedish-speaking coastal districts of Finland extending East as far as Porvoo. These were thus the first homes of the Finnish rug. Thence the art gradually spread deeper into the Finnish-speaking interior, finding its most fruitful soil in the Kokemäki river valley and elsewhere in Satakunta, in Häme, and in the neighbourhood of Lake Saarijärvi in Central Finland. In the 18th century it continued to spread eastwards.

In its refined form, the rug was essentially a luxury article, a fact that to some extent presupposed wealthy surroundings. From the 16th century, the manorial estates had supported and promoted the art of rug-weaving. In the following century the art began to be practised in the homes of the clergy too. Carried out by the women, rug-making developed in these houses as regards the richness of both design and colour, and it was also subject to the influences of new styles, rococo and classical. Later these designs spread to the rural centres: firstly to the prosperous families, to freeholders' homes, to feudal holdings, gradually to the houses of ordinary farmers and finally to the crofts. But East of Lake Päijänne and the Porvoo district, in Savo and in Carelia, this process was not yet completed before time and fashion had left behind the making of these rugs.



Eva Brummer '*Time*' 1956

Neovius, Helsinki

about the 1860's. In these parts, the making of decorative r
stopped at the manorial estate and parsonage.

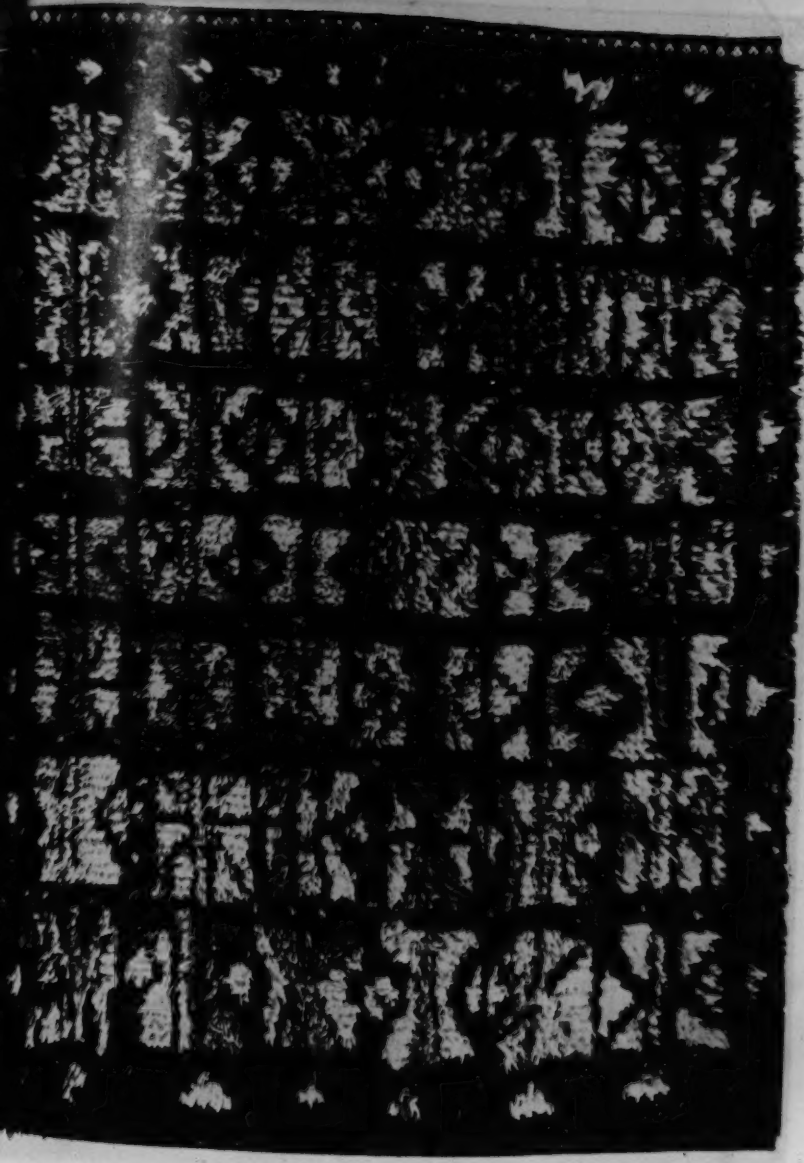
According to their designs rugs are divided into many types a
groups. From the comparatively simple surface decorations a
colour combinations of the oldest rugs, the finer forms of r
weaving have implied the increasing use of the special potentiali
of the rug as regards richness of tone and the adoption of n
motifs and stylistic stimuli, while the colours have increased a
become stronger in the densely knotted pile.

The old geometric patterning already offered practically unlim
opportunities for variety. Mention may be made of 16th century r
in which the centre was plain and the border of a different col
rugs with a striped centre field, rugs decorated with a shield (probab
that of John, Duke of Finland and later King of Sweden a
Finland, 1537–92), with crosses, and with rectangular or diag
checks. All these types have been continued and further develop

The oldest extant Finnish rug is probably derived from the ty
decorated with a shield. It was found in the Kuhmoinen distr
(Häme) and is dated 1695. It is made up of two strips, and t
subdivided motif in the centre of the rug resembles a shield, up
which two crosses are arranged. Our second oldest rug, dated 17
and found at Vesilahti (Satakunta), also consists of two strips. I
centre is decorated with large crosses inside which are smaller on
and as is the case in most old rugs the border is narrow.

Rugs decorated with rectangular or diagonal checks soon beca
very popular. These motifs appear in horizontal or diago
patterns that cover the centre field of the rug in repeating desig
In the mesh of the so-called net patterns there are generally diamon
-or crosses and also, later, conventionalized plant motifs and oth
forms of ornamentation. From the net type of rugs was derived th
winding stripe type, which was itself very old typologically, an
from this in turn came the wave-type rugs. These were already i
use at the beginning of the 18th century. When the diamond check
were split there emerged triangles, either separated or paired
'hourglasses', among the ornamentation.

In the old rugs, the rectangles, crosses and other geometrical figu
are larger than in the more modern ones. Miniature repeat
patterns developed primarily in the West, in the old cultural are
that held fast to the traditional styles. In the East, on the other han



ppu Niittylä *'Coalblack'* 1954

Inva, Helsinki

Finnish Rugs

An exhibition arranged by the
Finnish Society of Crafts and Design
and held in the
Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
from 7th March to 4th May, 1958

FOREWORD

Two years ago the Circulation Department of this Muse acquired an attractive Finnish rug. Our delight in this acquisitio was matched by that of visitors to the Museum, who began to ma interested enquiries about it as soon as it was shown in a publ gallery.

Now we are to show a considerable number of these rugs togethe and against a background of historical examples we are to have t opportunity of seeing the whole scope of the unique contributi which the Finnish artists have made to rug-weaving.

This collection of rugs has been gathered together on loan an formed into an exhibition by the Finnish Society of Crafts an Design. Most of the credit for bringing the exhibition here belon to the Director of that body, Mr. H. O. Gummerus. We are grateful to him, and also to the Finnish architect, Mrs. Lisa Johansson-Pap who has undertaken the design of the exhibition and its presentation in our temporary exhibition gallery.

TRENCHARD COX
Director, Victoria and Albert Muse

Details of the rugs shown in the exhibition are given on a loose leaf enclos in this booklet.

L. 773.
19. III. 1958.

FINNISH RUGS *by Eila Pajastie*

In the art and applied arts of Finland, and also in its architecture, there seems to be some justification for the view that in the North, where light is scarce for the greater part of the year, the aesthetic values of form are likely to be more developed than those of colour. On the other hand, it could well be argued that it is precisely the darkness and the people's longing for constant light and brightness that have here burst out in the most intense colour, producing an art that in its colours has less to do with external reality than with a dream-like beauty. In this respect one thinks perhaps first not so much of the art of painting as of textiles, and especially of rug-making with its traditions that reach far back into the past. The history of rug-making represents a unique chapter in the comparatively short development of art in Finland.

'First and foremost, the rug is a bed cover, the technical components of which are the warp, the weft and the pile'—so begins Professor U. T. Sirelius' classic work 'The Ryijy-rugs of Finland', which, since its appearance in 1924, has been a kind of bible for the Finnish art of rug-weaving. This prominent Carelian-born scholar stressed the Scandinavian origin of the Finnish rug and its western sources, as indicated by the old Scandinavian word 'ry', which appears in the Finnish word 'ryijy', and also by the fact that the oldest historical information about rugs dates from the 15th century in Sweden and Norway as well as in Finland (Vallis Gratiae monastery). The surest proof of the genetic connection between the rugs preserved in Sweden and in Finland is considered to lie in the fact that in both countries the most usual way of knotting the pile is by the so-called Turkish or Ghiordes knot.

Initially, the rugs seem to have been rough, heavy wraps for everyday use, with a long nap, usually plain, and used especially by seal hunters and ocean-going fishermen. But already in the 16th century, alongside the simple pile rugs, there appeared the costly pictorial rugs which were decorated with ornamentation and figures. The

the uniform surface decoration vanished and different designs, ra
angles, crosses, triangles and stars, appeared, and later new them
—flowers, animal and human forms, hearts and crowns. Sometim
they seem as if floating freely upon the surface of the rug, whi
becomes a means for personal expression. But even without the ba
of well-defined linear design, colour compositions of high artis
value were created in this field.

This phase of irregularity in design was followed, however, by a
attempt at balance, symmetry and concentration. At last a fixed sy
emerged around the waterways of Häme. Spur-wheels and hex
motifs are characteristic of the group of rugs which belong to thi
area. Another coherent group, which as far as colour usage i
concerned may be classed as the most beautiful (the typical colo
range includes yellows, browns, blues and blacks), appeared i
central Finland. Its most important motif is the tree, mostly in th
form of the tree of life; and this is often complemented by human
and animal forms, which give a pictorial character to many of th
rugs of this group.

Another group, which is represented especially abundantly i
Satakunta, makes use of tulips and other similar motifs—leaves
flowers and flower-pots being the main themes of its décor. Th
considerable group of Finnish historical rugs includes those i
baroque and rococo styles and those in the Swedish late 18th
century 'Gustavian' style. It is in these that an aristocratic character
has been most clearly expressed. As their ornamental resources
increased—countless forms of decoration were also taken from
embroidered linens—the rugs became divided into smaller and
smaller groups. But to list them all would exceed the scope of this
introduction.

Whilst already in the 1860's William Morris was protesting in
England against the despoliation of taste caused by the Industrial
Revolution, in the cottages of the Finnish backwoods thousands of
women's hands were still producing gracefully coloured pile rugs.
But the days of such small-scale handicrafts were numbered. James
Finlayson, a Scot, had set up a cotton loom in rural Tampere that
was later to develop into the 'Manchester of Finland'. From this
came the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Finland. For
their part, the cultured folk adopted to the best of their abilities the
eclectic tastes and attachment to knick-knacks that were characteristic
of the time.

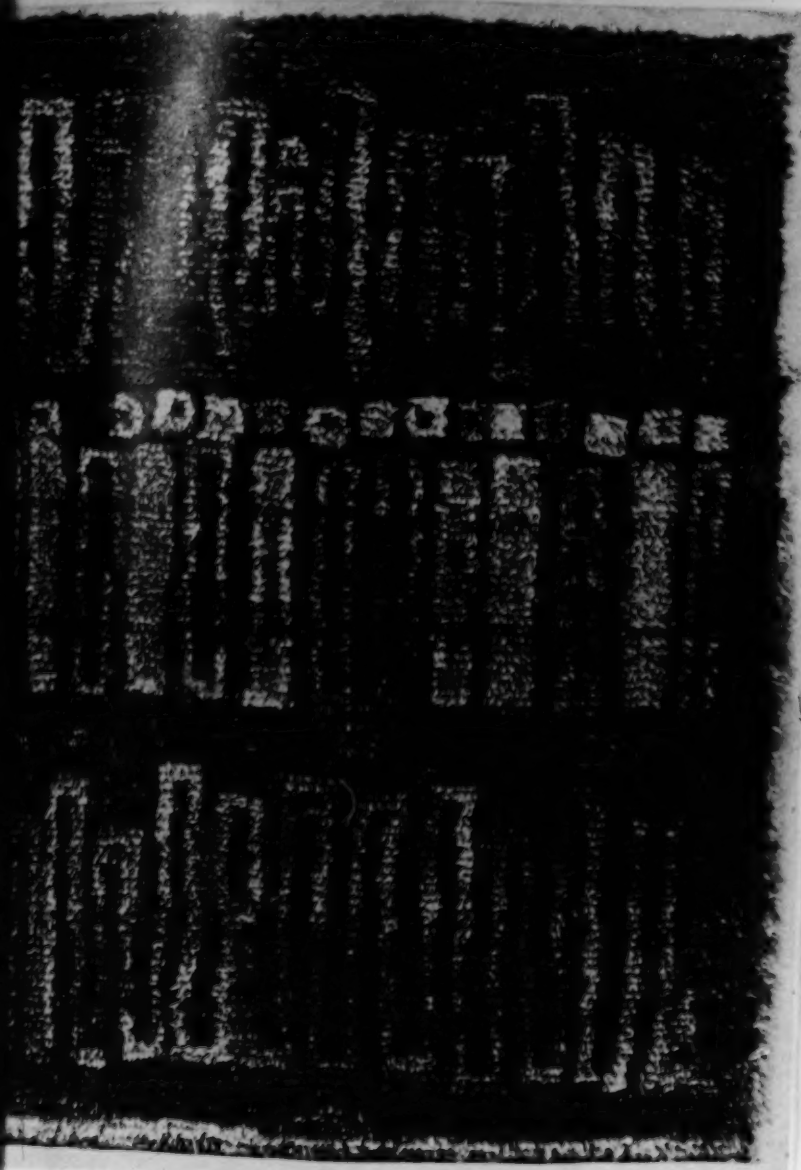
Ilvessalo '*Sundial*' 1955

Friends of Finnish Handicrafts

So the soil was ripe in Finland, too, for an awakening similar to that provoked by William Morris. Among those who set to work to accomplish this were C. G. Estlander, a professor of the history of literature, and Fanny Churberg, a painter. In 1871, the work of the former resulted in the creation of a school of handicrafts 'for the development of the artistic taste and skill of the younger generation of workers in the applied arts and handicrafts'. This was the forerunner of the present Institute of Crafts and Design. Four years later various persons who appreciated the aims of the School founded the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design. In 1879, Fanny Churberg wrote an article in a newspaper that gave a start to the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts, a society that was set up to protect the valuable heritage of the old Finnish handicrafts and was modelled on the similar organization established in Sweden five years earlier. The decisive spur to its activities had been given by the impressive collection of objects of ethnographic interest, including textiles, that university students of the 1870's had gathered from the countryside, a collection that was included in the first industrial exhibition to be held in Finland (Helsinki 1876) and gave rise to the National Museum.

Ethnographic concepts and the collections of the National Museum left their mark upon the first phase of the activities of the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts, which began to spread at the turn of the century. The designs transmitted to the urban and rural handicraft workers adhered closely to the style of traditional Finnish origin. The initiator of the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts seems, however, to have been concerned about new creative forms, as is apparent from a publication that appeared in 1888. Here women are urged to consider also new styles, and hints are given as to the stylistic range of natural motifs. But for the moment the society was controlled by people connected with the National Museum and they regarded with suspicion any movement to free the artistic treatment of the old patterns.

Finally, however, they had to admit that the public had grown tired of geometrical patterns. At the same time, the years of oppression had awoken in the civilized parts of the country a burning desire to show proof of Finnish national culture to the rest of Europe. The Paris Exhibition of 1900 gave the opportunity for this. The Friends of Finnish Handicrafts ordered from the painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela some textile designs for the decoration of the exhibition pavilion, which was designed in the national-romantic style by the three architects, Geselius, Lindgren and Saarinen.



ti Nyström *'Field'* 1954

Friends of Finnish Handicrafts

Thus the exhibition of 1900 marked a turning point in the activ
of the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts, with artists now playing
more prominent part. New designs were ordered from them, eith
directly or by way of prize competitions. These latter became
great importance as a rallying factor and awoke keen interest
especially among the younger artists. Further, the society took int
its service a number of artists, the painter Väinö Blomstedt an
the textile artists Lina Palmgren, Maria Schwartzberg and, later
Ingegerd Eklund.

At first rugs were of course only a fraction of the textiles wi
which the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts were concerned and whic
aroused such great interest among artists of very different fields. Ol
documents and faded photographs tell us that rug designs flowed
from the architect Eliel Saarinen, that another architect, Armas
Lindgren, famous for his granite palaces, was delighted at winning
a competition for table cloths when very young, that the sensitive
artist Helene Schjerfbeck gave creative thought to designing a coffee
pot holder, and that a host of artists from Albert Edelfelt to Kal
Svensson (better known as Carl Wilhelms, the sculptor) designed
rugs and tapestries. The culminating point of this creative work
teeming from all sides, was Gallen-Kallela's large red and yellow
flaming bench rug in all its monumental power. In the early part of
the new century the path traced by Gallen-Kallela was followed by
the artists Siru Virva (Sigrid Wickström-Paaer), Ellinor Ivalo and
Kaapo Engberg in their designs for rugs and tapestries.

At the beginning of the century most of the rugs were bench rugs
designed to cover seats with arm-rests and high backs typical of
the national-romantic style of interior decoration. Sometimes, in old
photographs, a rug can be seen on the floor. Only at the end of the
1920's is one seen mounted on the wall. But by then two events had
led to the old popular rug being so greatly esteemed that it could no
longer be exposed to wear and tear; and in general this attitude has
continued to the present day.

The first exhibition of old rugs was held in Helsinki in 1918. Six
years later U. T. Sirelius' monumental work 'The Ryijy-rug in
Finland' appeared, and this contained nearly a hundred colour
reproductions which are still regarded as being first-class. The
Finnish rug art of the 20's and 30's was conspicuously influenced by
the fine old models, although at the same time it reflected the
contemporary stylistic currents, notably cubism and functionalism
neo-classicism. One of the most outstanding representatives of the

art of the Finnish rug during these decades was Impi Sotavalta, who was working from just before the 1920's until her death during the second World War.

Although historical rugs may continue to offer a natural basis for modern rug-making some new and distinctive features have been acquired since the 1930's and the long interval caused by the shortage of materials during the war years. The modern rug is a strongly picturesque creation and in it can be seen a host of different shades of colour that softly blend into one another, in contrast to the old rug in which the border lines of the coloured areas were sharp.

An important source of inspiration in the development of the modern Finnish art rug was Arttu Brummer, who died in 1951. He was the art director of the Friends of Finnish Handicrafts, and the teacher of many generations of artists at the Institute of Crafts and Design. Among his pupils was the painter Gunvor Grönvik, who died in 1955, and who designed many so-called 'tone' rugs in which the colours are graduated and blended together.

The 'tone' rug has a very long nap, as may have been the case with the very oldest undecorated rugs, which have not of course survived. It may be that the makers of these old rugs wanted to produce a warm and permanent covering for the floor, which some feel is the most suitable place for rugs. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that considerations of utility have in no way affected the forms taken by modern rugs. The thick bushiness of the pile surface and the intensive glow of colour, in which is felt a hidden tremor of life, have been created from a need for artistic expression. It is easy therefore to understand the view of those who regard the literal trampling upon this hidden life as a sacrilege, and who demand for the rug a place on the wall as an independent work of art side by side with modern figurative or non-figurative works of art created from different materials.